

JOE FRAMPTOM

March 22, 1997

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Mame Warren,
Interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the 22nd of March, 1997. I'm in Lexington, Virginia, with Joe Framptom. We are here on the day after Fancy Dress, and that's why we're here, because you were real involved with Fancy Dress. But before we get into that, we were just talking about this legendary thing about stealing a locomotive. Tell me what you know about that story.

Framptom: Well, it involves the ATO, Alpha Tau Omegas, which were the third fraternity founded in the Lexington triad along Kappa Alpha order and Sigma Nu. And I think my grandfather was here when it occurred. I have some certainty of this. He graduated in 1933 from the law school, and he was a Beta, so he wasn't directly involved in it, but I think he was here when it happened. Most of what I've heard has come down from not him, but from other people. What I've heard is that a couple of ATOs or a group of ATOs took a train, and I don't know if they took it for a ride or they took it over to Sweet Briar to pick up their Fancy Dress dates. Somehow these ATOs took a train for some purpose, got caught, and then as a result of this, the entire ATO chapter got thrown off campus, and they're not allowed to come back on campus for ninety-nine years or until the last living chapter member dies, whichever comes last. That's pretty much what I know about it.

Warren: You know, I might pursue this with ATO headquarters.

Framptom: That might be a place to look.

Warren: That might be a place to look.

Framptom: They probably have a record of it.

Warren: So your grandfather was here, and you think it was about when he was here.

Framptom: I think it was when he was here, so it would have been, say, '32, '33, maybe '31, somewhere along in there.

Warren: All right. Well, I'm going to keep pursuing it.

Framptom: I'd be interested to see what happens, because —

Warren: Well, I'll let you know. If this leads to something, I will let you know. I will let you know.

So how far back does your association with Washington and Lee go? Your grandfather?

Framptom: My grandfather was at law school here, and my father was here in the sixties, and it took him five years to get through, actually. He came from a small private school in Maryland, had trouble, and so he went back to Gillman in Baltimore, and then he started up again and graduated in '66 from the C School. And while he was here, he was pretty involved in campus life. He was a dorm counselor. He served on the EC. He was secretary of the EC one year, and he was inducted into ODK. I think when he was here, he was a very prolific student, successful student, and between he and my grandfather, they left this great kind of legacy, I guess, that's starting up in our family. And now I have come here and graduated. My sister is now here. And I'm sure among the two of us, we'll probably have some kids come here. So I've just grown up hearing about, "W&L this," and "W&L that." And when I visited the school, I pretty much fell in love with the place and location.

Warren: So you were destined.

Framptom: Perhaps. There might have been some destiny there. It certainly felt like I fit in here. My father was certainly pleased to see me come here and very surprised to see my sister come here, because, of course, it was not coed, and he said, "I would never have expected to have two children to come to W&L, one who was a female." But two have.

Warren: Do you know how your father felt about coeducation when it was being decided?

Framptom: I think he was open and positive with the idea, because I think he felt that the quality of education was declining, I guess because a lot of students in the application process were turned off to the process of an all-male school. My father thinks that every year—I don't know when it started, but every year the quality of the students just kind of decreased a little bit because there were not the women there, and the women are a moderating influence and adds a lot of competitiveness to the academics that I think benefits everybody. I'm glad they're here, and I think he's very glad that they're here. I think they've done a lot, probably have done a lot to improve the school.

Warren: Okay. Well, I don't want to take up too much of your afternoon. You're probably pooped after all the work you've done. So let's just go right to it. Let's talk about Fancy Dress. Were you involved for more than one year?

Framptom: I was involved for three years. I went my freshman year, the '92 FD, which was the Christopher Columbus theme, but I wasn't involved that year. Another fraternity brother of mine named Leo Decanini, we like to build stuff, and we used to build fraternity floats. We used to build Habitat for Humanity houses, and we kind of built a lot of that stuff. He had a lot of carpentry skills coming in here. I had some. He had more than I did. We came in here, and the two of us got together and started fooling around with this stuff, and somebody, one of the guys in my dorm worked on FD our freshman year and put me onto this thing, said, you know, "You should go work for this."

So our sophomore year, without really knowing much about it, we just applied for this Construction Committee, because that's where we thought our interests lay, and they let us on. There was five of us on the committee that year, I think, or six, maybe, and we built a lot of stuff that year, in 1993.

The construction chairman that year was an SAE guy named Kelly Land. We didn't have any idea who he was at the time, but he turned out to be a very good person to work with and very open and very successful, and so we were glad to get to work on that.

Warren: What was the theme that year?

Framptom: The theme that year was – I think the official title was – well, it was some kind of silver screen theme. I forget the official wording, but it was the whole silver screen thing, the whole movie theme. In the big gym we had sets from various movies. We had a big set of "The Wizard of Oz" in one corner with a sixteen-foot-tall emerald palace and some of the characters out front. In one corner, we had a western scene from "True Grit," John Wayne's big movies. Another corner that year we had Rick's Cafe from "Casablanca," with false walls, and it was a big cafe with painted floor and tables up there, and we had a piano up on that. And in the fourth corner of the big gym we had a set from "Gone With the Wind." We were originally going to build this staircase that Scarlet O'Hara comes down. I've never seen the movie, but I've heard about this staircase. We originally thought about building that, but we wound up just building a model of the city of Atlanta burning, and we got it to burn by – we put some Mylar and some shiny material in the windows and got some lighting effects to go to work, and it worked pretty well.

In the small gym that year, we had a big screen in the small gym that I think had rotating slides out of various movies on it. The entrance was something – I designed the entrance in sociology class one day, and it turned out to be big ticket offices, like a hexagonal ticket booth about eight feet tall and four feet on a face. It had a big thirty-two-foot-long angled side that stuck out about five or six – probably more like eight feet out from the glass and went back to the corner. So you walked in the sides of this entrance.

Now, our entrances, in the past couple of years, have been things you walked through, like in Paris you had your Arc de Triomphe, you walk through the middle doors, but this year you walked through the side doors, because the middle door was blocked off by this big ticket office.

But that year, I worked in the big gym. I didn't have anything to do with the small gym. I worked in the big gym that year and helped out with the "Gone With the Wind" corner, mainly, and the "True Grit" corner, and it worked out. It was a really good thing, and the ball went off pretty well.

We had Bo Thorpe there. He's kind of been trying to become a part of the W&L tradition, and he hadn't been doing a very good job lately because they keep changing the date around, and he has his date set in stone.

Warren: Who is this?

Framptom: Bo Thorpe. He has this orchestra, and he did the swing band three of the four years that I was here. It used to be that the ball was – at least when I was here, the ball was the first weekend in March except for Mock Con years, and so he had got into this pattern of scheduling it for the first weekend in March. Last year it wasn't that weekend because of Mock Con, and this year it wasn't that weekend for I don't know what reason. But he hasn't done it the last two years, but he was doing it for a couple of years, and he did a very good job.

Anyway, Leo and I and Kelly had a great time building all that stuff that year. We loved the concept of just being able to show up and kind of design this stuff. We always had to work with the decorations people, and that was always one of the big challenges of setting up for the decorations, because it was usually all girls that did this, and I don't mean that derogatory; it was just the way it was. Pretty much all girls did all the decorations, and they wanted to do this and that, and we had to have some halfway ground between what they wanted and what we thought we could do.

Warren: So are you saying they had ideas that weren't realistic?

Framptom: Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't. I can't remember anything specific out of that year, but there always seemed to be a contingent when I was on that committee that wanted to do the "Alice in Wonderland" theme, and Leo and I were always, "No, no, no, no," because we could never figure out how to build big mushrooms. We always looked for a theme that had big recognizable objects that weren't too difficult to build, but things like round mushrooms – and the guys out of the "Alice in Wonderland" set, you know, the important things are all characters like the Cheshire cat and Mad Hatter and all these. Those kind of things are pretty difficult to build and get them to look like what they look like in the movie. So we always try to pick themes that had a lot of big stuff that we could get at.

Warren: How does the theme get decided on?

Framptom: Well, the way we did it the year that I was the chairman, and I think the way it had been done other times, was we put a theme box out in the co-op, and anybody that wanted to could submit theme ideas. Then everybody who applied – we usually had about a hundred applications for forty slots on the committee. Everybody that applied had to put down three themes that they thought they might be interested in, and then we had a lot of repetition, but when all this was said and done, we had a hundred themes to think about.

And so the first meeting – and we really can't do much with FD until we figure out what the theme's going to be. The first meeting we put all these themes down on a list of paper, and I sat up in front of the committee, and we just read through them all, and I asked everybody to think briefly about each one, and we read through them, and then we just kind of opened up, and people said, well, they liked this and they really liked this one. So we narrowed it down to about a half a dozen themes, and then we sent people into little groups to go think about what would you do with this theme and then do a little research into what kind of things could we do with this. From that half

dozen, these people came back a week later with their reports and said we could do this theme, we could do this, this, this, this, and this. Then we voted on it from there.

So it's a very democratic process, and pretty much any theme is open, except we—I hate to say it, but Leo and I kind of vetoed a couple of themes. Like the "Alice in Wonderland" theme we kind of vetoed that one year. I don't know that we vetoed it, but there are some themes that are always more workable than others, and those always seem to win out. We've had a lot of good success with those. But it was a very democratic process. Everybody kind of had their say and voted on it, and it worked out pretty well. Because if you don't have a theme everybody likes, you'll have a hard time to get the committee to do a lot. We always tried to look for a theme that had big colorful decorations and things that people could recognize. If you have to put a sign on it and say what this is, then that's not good.

But like last night when we went in there, it was a circus, so it's very generic kind of clown, clown kind of thing. Everybody can recognize that. When we did Paris, you know, we had the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe and that kind of stuff. So those kind of things that people can just pick up and recognize are, I think, what lend themselves to the most successful—

Warren: You mentioned there are forty people on the committee.

Framptom: My sophomore year, there were about sixty on there. My junior year there were about sixty on there, and then my senior year we cut it down to forty-three because we thought that sixty was just getting too cumbersome.

Warren: Let's talk about your junior year. What would sixty people do?

Framptom: Well, my junior year, the theme was "Magic Carpet Ride," and we had about sixty on the committee. We had about a half dozen people on a construction committee. We had another, say, half dozen on memorabilia; another, say, three, four, five doing publicity, which consisted of making signs, alerting newspapers, and getting press, and that kind of stuff, but the bulk of the committee has always been the

decorations people, because we just usually split the decorations. The decorations is a kind of subcommittee. We kind of split that down even further to a balcony committee, an entrance committee, you know, small gym committee, and then four committees for the big gym. Everybody has one corner. Then because of that, we had three or four people on each one of those, so we had twenty-five or thirty people on decorations out of the sixty.

When it comes down to preparing the ball, that's really where a lot of the work is, is the decorations, and you need the people in there at the last minute. I don't know if this kind of stuff is what you want put into the—

Warren: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I'm very interested.

Framptom: But that's where the bulk of the people went, and when we did it my senior year, we decided—the other two people that I started out with, the auditor and the vice chairman, the three of us decided to cut that down to forty-three, and we kind of paired odds and ends out of these various committees, and we also put a couple of new positions in that year, one to a decorations supervisor, because it used to be just having little decorations groups, you know, but there was no overlying decorations person that was kind of responsible for tying them all together, and so we tried to do that, and that seemed to work out pretty well.

Warren: So your senior year, you were—what's the title?

Framptom: I was the chairman my senior year.

Warren: Chairman. How do you get picked to be chairman? Do you run for it?

Framptom: Well, you apply to the EC, and the EC selects the chairman, but I think the EC—I remember my junior year, the EC was kind of looking around already because they know that the chairman is going to have to come out of last year's committee, pretty much, because it's a difficult position to drop into any leadership position cold. And so the chairman had to come out of that past committee.

So my sophomore year, I was on the construction committee. My junior year, I was the chairman of the construction committee, and then my senior year, somehow they selected me for the chairman. I thought hard about applying. I thought about not applying, because FD was always kind of frustrating in a sense, because there's always a lot of this – an awful lot of work, it all comes down to the wire, and there's always a lot of people that – everybody kind of wants their own thing, and sometimes very frustrating trying to integrate all this stuff. And also, by my junior year, I was starting to think that FD was a lot of expenditure for a four-hour ball, and there are people that criticize that aspect of the ball, and I understand where they're coming from. But I wasn't sure my senior year I wanted to take on the responsibility, but I wound up applying for it at the last minute, like the day before the thing was due, and it had been out for two weeks to apply. I ran up there one day, filled out an application, stuck it in the box the day before it was due, the day it was due or something.

They interviewed me, and they didn't really ask me much about how one would run the ball. What they wanted to talk about, the most important thing I learned from the interview was – my junior year we were in the big gym and we had a big storm roll through or something, and the power went out. The power was out on the whole campus or in the whole town or something. It was Friday morning, and, you know, the power was out, and here we are trying to set up this ball. There's no lights, no electricity. There's nothing. And going into the gym that morning, I remember [unclear] say, "Well, the power's out, but that's not really a big deal, because we've already had most of our heavy construction done. We can just use our hand tools." Leo and I were just kind of saying, "This will be kind of neat. We'll be like Bob Villa. We'll get our hand tools and go to work."

We got in that gym, and what we didn't think about was there's no windows in that gym. It's pitch black. It's dark as a tomb. And so we stood around there and scratched our heads for a couple of hours in this pitch-black tomb thinking we've got

eight hours before this ball. What the heck are we going to do? But they got the power back on and it was no big deal, but that's what they wanted to talk about when they interviewed me was, "What happened when the power went out? What did you all think?"

Warren: That's a good question.

Framptom: I told them what I just told you, that we thought it would be kind of neat until we got in there and saw how dark it was. They picked me to do it that year, and they picked Dan Felton to be the vice chair, and he'd worked on it two years previously and know what was going on. And then, interestingly enough, the auditor that year was a girl named Kathy Boozer, and she'd never been on the FD committee, but her connection to FD was that at the time she was dating Kelly Land, who'd been the construction chairman the first year Leo and I had done it two years previously, so for us that was a kind of neat connection, because it was almost like we were working with Kelly again. So the three of us – the EC picks us in the spring, like in the spring term. So we kind of have spring and summer to mull over the big things like committee organization.

We came back that fall, and the first thing after men's Rush was finished, around the first of September, we got the ball rolling and picked our committee. We had about a hundred applications, I think. We had a hundred applications. Everybody fills out an application and comes in for a five- or ten-minute interview, and then we just picked off of that.

And there's a lot of turnover, I think. There used to be, anyway. About half or better of the people would be back the second year from the previous year, and we tried to distribute among all the classes. We didn't want all juniors and seniors, because then we had to have some people to carry it on. Melissa Courson, this year's chairman, was on that committee that year, as was Joanna Munson. And so we just picked them, and we put together a pretty good committee that year. They certainly made some

mistakes, I think, but I think overall it was a great committee, it turned out to be a good, successful ball.

Warren: And you felt like the forty-three were enough?

Framptom: I felt like the forty-three was enough, forty-three were enough, pretty much. I thought there was a lot of fluff in the previous committee. There were a lot of people I thought – they said, "Well, there's six people on the Memorabilia Committee, so my job is not individually that important." I kind of felt by shrinking the size of the committees, we were kind of increasing the involvement of the people that were on there, because it was the same amount of work, just less people to split it up amongst, and it worked out pretty well. It worked out pretty well. It would have been good to have those extra twenty people around the gym a couple of days before, but we managed to – we survived without that.

Warren: What time of year does the theme get selected? When does that happen?

Framptom: Well, for the '95 ball, we picked the committee during the first two weeks of September, and by October first we had the theme decided.

Warren: So how do you keep it a secret all that time?

Framptom: Well, that's the trick.

Warren: That's a lot of people to keep a secret.

Framptom: Yeah, it is a trick. We try the usual enticements, the carrot-and-stick kind of thing. "This is really important, and we want to keep it a secret," and there's a lot of people that treat it that way, but there's always some people that find out what it is. I don't think that they find out is such a big deal. I think just kind the aura of the secrecy is the magic of the ball. So as long as we attempt to maintain that, I think that's good. Everybody kind of does their best, and sure it gets out, and people sit around and talk about how they're going to design this and that, and you know, somebody else overhears them, or somebody checks out eight books on how build a circus, and their roommate figures out they wouldn't just be looking this up for their edification. So it

kind of gets out, but that's a really interesting part of FD, because it always kind of adds to the – the rumor mill really starts to grind about that theme.

Especially, I remember my sophomore year when we did the movie theme, people kind of knew it was about the movies, but some thought it was all "Gone With the Wind." Some thought it was a western theme. In actuality, those were only small parts of the larger theme. And that's kind of a neat thing, because people try to figure it out and they kind of work around it and get close, but sometimes they just never do.

And then, you know, say for '95, we can say, well, we're going to do it on Paris. Well, that's a big topic and there's about 80,000 ways to spin that topic. So people may figure out the theme, but they never really understand the spin, I think, until a little later. That's a good question. It's a tough thing to do to keep that secret.

Warren: So which year did you do, '95?

Framptom: Right. I was the chairman in '95.

Warren: '95, and the theme then was –

Framptom: It was Une Soirée Parisienne.

Warren: I heard real good things about that one.

Framptom: I think it was a good ball, but I think – I hate to say it – I don't hate to say it. I guess I'm pleased to say it, I think the one I went to last night was just every bit as good. I had a lot of fun with this one. I used to think that I – this is another thing, Leo and I and Kelly Land and the other guys who worked, we used to build the heck out of this stuff. We went through enough lumber to build small houses some years, built these big entrances and that. And as it turns out, a lot of that stuff is not really as important as we like to think it is. It's really – you know, do the people come and does everything mesh together and do the people come and do they have a good time? That's really how you define a good FD, in that sense.

In that sense, the best FD I ever went to was last night's, because I had the most fun last night, and maybe that's because the other three years, I kind of knew what we

were hoping to do and what we didn't get to do, and, you know, was saying, "Oh, we were going to do this, but we couldn't do it." So it was kind of like a little letdown. You'd add those things up, and just the stress of trying to put that all together. But when you just come in and see it like you did last night, then you say, "Wow!" It doesn't matter what they were going to do. It just matters what they did, and what they did was great. It looked great, and there was a great atmosphere there. It's just that whole magic of FD. That's one of the greatest things about FD, is the way it brings the school together like that. This school has a very strong social tradition, and FD, I think, is at the pinnacle of that tradition.

This school, it's a fairly homogenous student body, I think, as far as colleges go, but the students are fairly – are kind of cliqueish, you know. Everything's oriented around the Greek system, and because of that, it's fairly cliqueish. But it seems to me that in a sense, FD is one of the big events of the year that kind of equalizes that. Everybody comes together on that dance floor, and it doesn't matter where you're from, what you're studying, who you hang out with. Everybody is just kind of in there together, and you see everybody and everybody sees everybody else, and that's really the whole magic of FD, in that sense. That's where the fun is, just getting out there and seeing everybody and being seen and having a good time is the important part.

The decorations and the things like the fireworks that I used to think were so all important are really not – they're not as big as I like to think. Just the creation of that atmosphere is important, however that atmosphere gets created, you know, whether you do it with a forest load of lumber or whether you do it with something else. Just the creation of that atmosphere is the important part.

Warren: One of the things I was struck by last year, and I had only been here for a very short time when Fancy Dress happened, I was so impressed that we were all out there together. I guess from a student's point of view, it's interesting to have people from different fraternities meshing, but I was intrigued to see the students and the faculty

and the administrators and the buildings and grounds people there in their black ties. I loved it.

Framptom: They're all there, and it is just an amazing event from that, because, you know, everybody at school is kind of on their different planes. You know, the professors hang out in one way and the students hang out in another way, but FD kind of brings everybody up to the same grand level. A lot of people talk about that W&L people drink and this and all that and that you see this excess and all, but when you go to FD, you know, you don't see any have that. You don't see people fighting at FD. Just everybody rises to that occasion, and it's just fabulous because, like I say, that gym floor and that black tie is just this great equalizer on everybody, and everybody just rises to the occasion and it just adds to the grandness of the event.

Warren: It really does. Well, now tell me about Paris and Une Soirée Parisienne.

Framptom: Well, we picked that theme out of a group of about four or five others. I remember that year we also thought about doing something like a Monte Carlo or some kind of gambling theme, but then we weren't sure whether we liked that. People kind of thought there was that kind of sleaze aspect of that and didn't want any parts of that. Seems like we thought about doing a Monopoly board that year. That's probably a neat idea, but the problem we thought with the Monopoly board is, again from a decoration standpoint, the big gym is fine, but what do you do with the rest of the stuff?

Also somebody wanted to do Peter Pan or some other cartoon or cartoon-oriented theme, but the previous year we'd done a Magical Carpet Ride, which kind of had a cartoon theme. And then the silver screen year, there was a lot of talk that they had a lot of trouble with trademark or copyright violations and almost got in big trouble. Because I don't know if you've seen the shirts for that, but they had the Paramount Pictures' logo on the shirts, except instead of the peak, they had House Mountain on there, and they had the characters on the back from the Wizard of Oz on

the shirt and they're duplicated in there, and apparently that's walking some kind of fine line.

So we were looking for a theme, something that had a very elegant base that people could appeal to. Leo and I wanted something that we thought we could do some construction with. We wanted something to avoid the copyright problems. Somebody came up with this Paris idea, and it seemed to fit. It seemed to fit everything. There was this elegance to Paris that is amazing. The women on the committee loved it because a lot of them had been to Paris or were intrigued by Paris and the excitement and the grandness of Paris. Those of us on the construction aspect of it liked it because, you know, things like the Arc de Triomphe and Eiffel Tower, you know, we could build those, and we did. And then it just kind of lent itself very well to an elegant atmosphere, and I think it was a very good theme, and it worked out pretty well.

We even had a French title on there, you know, *Une Soirée Parisienne*, to kind of add to that aura. I got a lot of laughs in that committee because it took me a while to get that pronunciation down, and they still say I drawl that out in whatever way that people say that I speak, they say that I drawl that out. We had a lot of fun with that. We had a French major on the committee. Carrie Baker came up with the name and spelled it out for us, and we were all very pleased about that theme, and it was a great theme. Like I say, the theme has to be good from the get-go. If you have people on the committee who, from the start, don't like the theme at all, then you've got a problem, because then right away you're trying to get somebody to volunteer their time to do something, volunteer a lot of their time to do something they're not interested in, is not a recipe for success.

So the Paris theme turned out very well, and we built along the back wall of that gym was about a forty foot long, averaging maybe sixteen-feet-tall model of the Palace of Versailles. It kind of went all around, and the band sat out in front of it, and it was

made of just Styrofoam, but it was all painted up on a wood frame. We were very fortunate that year to have some good art students, one of whom turned out to be the chairman the next year, Ashley Bell, and she was very art oriented, and we had paintings from the Louvre. We just got prints from some museum somewhere. We had paintings from the Louvre. In one of the back corners of the big gym, we built a big heavy-duty stage, and we had these can-can dancers, and we hired this dancing troupe, and you know, Doug Thorpe was doing his thing, and he would go on break, and these can-can dancers would come out, and they would do their routine with the big ruffled skirts and everything. That was a really neat aspect, because a lot of times FD is just kind of a static display, and this time we actually had these dancers out there. They had their own light show and their own music and everything, and they came on and off during the band breaks.

Then in the other corner, we had this massive garden. God, it was probably forty feet long and maybe twenty, thirty feet wide. We built it so it was a walk-through garden. You walked up on steps. You walked through the garden. It had a rail, and it had a little false stream running through there and had trellises, and we had about four thousand bucks worth of plants on this thing, you know, tulips, all kinds of flowers. I don't know where they got them all. Somebody down at Lexington Florist, Dan Felton put all these things in, and we put all the flowers in this corner, and that corner just looked spectacular.

I mean, it was a good, simple walk-through corner, just spectacular. It had a little porch there with a couple of benches in it, and then we had some streetlights around, and that was amazing. The only thing bad about that corner was I looked up sometime during the ball, I think it was late at the ball, and there was some woman. I guess she'd just gotten a little too sick, a little upset in her stomach over in that corner, right there in those plants, but you know...

Warren: Oops.

Framptom: Oops. But other than that, it was a really interesting corner. Then we had an Eiffel Tower in the small gym, and Leo built this Eiffel Tower. Leo built this Eiffel Tower, and it was twenty feet tall, and you could walk up through the Eiffel Tower, and you stood up in the Eiffel Tower, and had your picture made standing in the Eiffel Tower, and that was back in the back of the big gym.

Warren: That was in the big gym or the small gym?

Framptom: In the back of the small gym. And then the entrance, we had the Arc de Triomphe. You could walk through that.

You know, we thought about the theme. You know, stuff just jumped out at us, like the Arc de Triomphe as an entrance. What else do you put, you know? You say, "Well, you've got to have the Eiffel Tower, so we've got to put the Eiffel Tower in there somewhere. And the Palace of Versailles is amazing. You can put that up there." And we thought that theme, instantaneously stuff was just coming up. We actually had, you know – we almost had to narrow stuff down. Usually it's like, "Well, okay, we've got to figure out something to put in this corner. We've got to figure out something to put in this corner." That year was almost like, "We've got to leave something out because we just can't put it all in."

We had a massive construction budget that year. We spent like about six thousand bucks worth of lumber. The whole ball, we spent about seventy thousand bucks putting that one on. And it worked out really well. The only flop in that ball was the balloon drop. We had oftentimes in the past done fireworks, and we had fireworks coming off the football field, but the fireworks are what's kind of bad because it was a fairly short – fireworks are expensive, and there's a fairly short display, like five minutes, and a lot of people would miss them because, you know, it would take everybody a while to get out to see them. Or if the weather was bad, if the clouds were low, if it was cold and snowy or something. So we tried to get away from the fireworks, and we thought about doing a big balloon drop in there. So we hired these guys to do a

balloon drop for us. It might have been a good idea, but it didn't get executed all that well, but still, I thought the ball – granted, I have the most biased opinion, but I thought the ball worked out pretty well, and I was pretty pleased to be a part of it. We had a lot of good people on the committee that made a lot of excellent contributions that year, and everything panned out well for it.

Warren: You mentioned earlier that the small gym often poses problems. Why is that?

Framptom: Well, the problem with the small gym, well, one of the big problems with the small gym is that track that overhangs. That might be the biggest problem, because in the big gym, you can put stuff in the corners and you can go up high with it, but in the small gym that track is there, and so you only have about ten or twelve feet underneath that track that you can decorate with. And also the small gym, you can't really load that up with big decorations because it's not that big to start with. I think part of it is to do with that track, and I think part of it is that the focus is always kind on the big gym, and the focus is always on the more elegant deal going on in the big gym, because that's where the swing band is, and then the small gym kind of gets left. The other problem is, if you want to put anything big in there, and we always did it, but they didn't do it this past one, and I thought it worked out great, you know, last night, it was fabulous, but when we did it, they always pretty much tried to put something big in the back of the big gym.

Like that year, '95, we had the Eiffel Tower in the back, you know, back there by the offices. And the year before that, in '94, when we did the Magic Carpet Ride, I don't know why, but we built a gazebo and put a gazebo back there, and you could come stand in the gazebo and sit down. The year before that, in '93, we had that big movie screen back there. So we always tried to build something, but it was always tough to get stuff to go in there.

Warren: I thought last night it was the best part of the whole thing.

Framptom: Yeah. I thought last night it was fabulous, the way it worked out. When you think about the big top, that carousel, that small gym lends itself. You know, that overhanging track, which we often thought was a curse, was a blessing for them last night with that overhanging track. We'd often done the ceiling in the small gym, but last night they had it coming up to the ring like a circus tent, but we always just had it draped up over a bar. But last night that small gym was amazing. It just looked like a tent.

Warren: And with those lights, those strands of lights.

Framptom: And those lights coming down it, and the carousel horses, it was by far and away the best small-gym decoration I've ever seen and probably ever hope to see. I mean, it was fabulous. The small gym just lent itself to that theme, and they did a beautiful job of putting that together.

The other thing about the small gym is that I think most people spend most of the time in the big gym, and it has to be that way, because the big gym is I don't know how many times larger, but people probably spend three-fourths of their time in the big gym and one-fourth of their time in the small gym, and I always spent almost all my time in the big gym at the ball because I never built much in the small gym. Other people always did that, and it always seemed like events conspired against us and we always had a crappy band in there, so nobody ever wanted to stay in there. It was just kind of like the small gym was kind of like this bastard child of the ball a lot of years, but last night it turned out very well. It was fabulous.

Warren: How does the band get picked?

Framptom: Well, that's—I don't really know that.

Warren: So the Fancy Dress people don't have anything—

Framptom: Yeah, we do pick that, and it used to be that we had—or in the first two years I did it, when I was a sophomore and junior, the committee picked the band as a whole. People thought of bands that they might want to get, and then we'd try to pick

them from that. It was kind of a vote thing. I'm pretty shady on how that worked, because I never had much to do with it. But my senior year, we made a new position. We put somebody in charge of that and called them the Entertainment Coordinator, because there always seemed to be a lot of hassle with the bands. They always had all these little things in their contract, like they want eleven bottles of bottled water and four large pizzas and all that kind of stuff. Then you'd have to coordinate the sound and all that stuff. So we just put this guy in there, and we said, "Okay. Now, you find some bands and bring them to us, and we'll vote on them or whatever, and then you be responsible for taking care of all these little things that they need and making sure the sound equipment gets in and making sure you've got guys to move them in on Friday afternoon and all that."

So we did that that year, and that worked out pretty well. That worked out pretty well. We had a problem that year because we unknowingly got committed into a band, we were trying to just get a price on them, and we somehow wound up committing ourselves to this band, and we got the price, found it was too high for us, so we were kind of stuck into this contract, and this was a big mistake that I made, is not overseeing this or not understanding how this works, not getting help when I needed it. And so we got this band that year that was a little more than what we'd budgeted, and so we kind of had to pull away from some other things to cover that, but it turned out pretty well. I think the band that year was pretty good. They always try to get a Motown—kind of a Motown, something to contrast with the band that's in the big gym.

They always try to get somebody that's not—you know, there's some very good bands that play in fraternity house basements around here, like Dave Matthews, who's now a megastar, used to play on the campus a lot, you know, three or four or five years ago, before he went through the roof. And they thought about getting him in the small gym, and they thought about getting Doug Clark and the Hot Nuts, who play on campus all the time. But the thing is, those kind of bands, people have heard those

guys and they already know them. We always tried to bring in somebody else that was a little step above that. I said a minute ago that the bands were all – we never seem to have good bands, but I guess that's really an exaggeration of the truth. I think they usually turned out pretty good.

Warren: We need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: A while ago, you said you had some kind of a moral crisis about the amount of money that was being spent. Talk to me about that.

Framptom: Well, I did, and I kind of still do. I guess I have to digress a little and say that I know now that there's people around – I've heard that there's a motion on some faculty committee or something to move FD to spring break or something like that, and some people in the campus community view FD as this kind of dead span of three or four days in the academic year when you can't do anything in class because everybody's at FD, and they're all drinking in preparation of FD. I think FD is, like I say, one of the greatest traditions the school has going for it, especially in the social aspect, and I hope they don't go changing anything that will kill off FD. So I hope FD continues, you know, in the tradition it has been in the past few years of this big extravagant event, but at the same time, the big extravagant event costs an awful lot of money for a four-hour – you know, a three- or four-hour ball.

So there's kind of that dichotomy there that you want this big event that everybody loves, but I always felt guilty about having this kind of money – and it stems from the fact, I think, the realization anyway, it stems from the fact that Leo and I, also the other guy – I shouldn't just say Leo and I, because that would make it sound like it was Leo and I and nobody else, but just Leo and I used to do all this together, everything from building FD to everything else. We also built for Habitat for Humanity on Saturdays. We used to go over to BV and build for Habitat on Saturdays, and our senior year I wasn't very involved in it, but Leo was very involved in getting a Habitat

house built in Lexington here. He and another girl put this together, and they pretty much built the house with a crew of people, and now that's apparently a pretty strong tradition.

But when you go work on a Habitat house and you see these guys are building houses for homeless or needy people for twenty-thousand bucks, and you turn right around on Saturday afternoon after you've finished, you know, hanging vinyl side for these people, and you turn around and you go work on the big gym, and you're blowing seventy-thousand bucks for a four-hour party where you know seventy-five percent of the people have had too much wine before they've gotten there anyway, it just seems like this – I just always felt a little guilty about it. All this lumber we used to get, you know, we'd go out and get lumber by the pickup-truck full and just paper and all this stuff. All this stuff, this decoration stuff, twenty-five thousand, thirty-thousand dollars worth of wood and construction, decoration materials alone, and we used to go out and get this stuff, and we'd use it and essentially dispose of it.

So I always kind of felt a little bad about that, but I think it's well worth it. The students continue to buy the tickets, and so as long as people continue to come, I don't think there's anything really too wrong with it, and we always gave this stuff to the high schools and the theater departments anyway.

I've heard that the Rockbridge County High School prom happens to be the same theme as FD. In spring they just use our decorations. I think, you know, that's probably – there's a lot of stuff – matter of fact, I was talking to some of the guys this weekend, some of the lighting guys, some of the security guards and that, and the year that we did the Paris theme, we built a bunch of benches, like we built six benches, pretty – they're not *Southern Living*-type benches, but they're not bad. And those things are still floating around on the guys' porches.

And then another guy was telling us that some stairs we built a few years ago for like the garden platform or whatever, he was using them in his house now. And these

other guys take our lumber, and some of these guys build extensions onto their houses with it. One of the guys over there was telling me he's got a stack of this stuff, and he's getting ready to use it to build onto his house. So, you know, in that sense it's not like it's just going into a landfill somewhere, but it is a lot of money for – it's certainly the most expensive four-hour event I've ever been to.

Warren: I have a friend who's an art teacher out at the high school, and I can tell you that you make a huge contribution out there. Have you all ever gone out to the prom to see what they do?

Framptom: I never went out, and I guess now I wish I had.

Warren: It's a pretty big contribution to the community.

Framptom: Well, that makes me feel good that we do that, and we try to buy – we try to get all our stuff locally. We have our teeshirts printed locally. We buy the lumber from lumber yards locally, and I don't think that's really that big a deal. It's not like we're infusing this bunch of cash, because five-thousand bucks at a lumber yard is small change for them when they're in the business of building houses. But all the same, these guys at the theater and the high school, it makes me feel good to know that they're getting stuff. When I was the chairman, we sent letters out to these different high schools, their art departments, and said, you know, "We're having this ball. This is our theme." And what I said was, "Send a postmarked letter back to my mailbox if you want any parts of this." And in the order I got these letters, I made appointments with them, and I said, "Okay. You can come in. What do you want?"

They'd say, "We want this and this," and they wrote that down, put their names on it so they could come in here Saturday morning at 6 a.m. with their students and their crowbars, and they take it with them. Everybody kind of gets what they want, and they can use this and that. I'm glad that that happens. And we also reuse some stuff from year to year, but not a lot, but we try to do some of that. It all cuts down on that little waste aspect.

Warren: You've mentioned the auditor a number of times. What's the role of the auditor?

Framptom: The auditor is the one that controls all of the bucks, and the whole ball – it's really funny how this works. The whole ball is funded off of ticket sales and memorabilia sales, but of course, we start spending money in October, and we don't realize one penny of income. Well, outside of ads from the playbill, I should say. We always try to make the playbill self-sufficient. We sell enough ads to get the playbill done. Other than that, everything comes from these ticket sales, and we start spending money in October or November, and we don't see any money come back in until a week before the ball. And so the school is always – essentially what they do is just give us an interest-free loan. They just cover all our costs for us, and then we just pay them back when we get it in. That is actually a critical element. I mean, the financing of this ball is – you know, the university is very generous and helpful, and without that help we'd never be able to do this, because we would have to have some way of buying the stuff. I guess we could buy it on credit. But we do it from the school.

One of the big problems with the ball is, well, you set this kind of budget. You know, we say the budget's going to be seventy-five thousand dollars and tickets are going to take forty-five bucks a pop, and teeshirts are going to cost this. And we have to think, well, how many tickets are we going to be able to sell. So we say we've got this budget of seventy-five thousand dollars or whatever, but in actuality, we don't have that cash. That's just what we hope to raise. So it's always this kind of gamble.

The university helps us out in the bad years, and I guess they get the extra cash in the good years, but, you know, there's a lot of events. If people don't like the theme or if the weather's bad or something like that, then ticket sales can be off. That happened the year we did Paris. We actually wound up being something under budget, a couple thousand dollars under our budget, but our revenues were well underneath what we were projecting. So we wound up being about three-thousand

bucks in the hole, and EC has bailed us out. They essentially just said, "Okay, here's three thousand bucks. Go pay your bills."

Warren: Why do you think, when you had such a wonderful theme, why do you think you –

Framptom: Well, a lot of people talk about the weather was bad that year. That doesn't seem to make a lot of sense to me, because there's not – I mean, there's some people that come in from outside the area, but there aren't very many. I don't think whether there's a little bit of snow on the ground or not is going to influence somebody's decision whether or not they want to walk four blocks to the ball. I don't think that's a big – a lot of it involves the hype for the ball, and that's kind of the thing about the ball I've never really been able to understand, is what drives people to the ball and why do some come and why do some not. Most everybody seems to come, but not everybody does.

But the auditor, anyway, controls all of this funding, and it's a big, big, big job, because we've got all these chairmen running around, these guys ordering lumber, the ladies ordering paper and ordering teeshirts, and we've got all these accounts at lumber yards and Walmarts and mail-order stores and sportswear stores for the teeshirts, and hardware stores, and the auditor has to just manage all this financial information, and it's a big job, and it's one that has to be done pretty well.

This is another rumor that I've heard, but they had some big problems with the funding, I think, the year before I got here, which would have been the ball in 1991, and what happened is there was just a lot of waste and they went a hundred-thousand dollars over budget or something, or some massive total, and they took everybody out to the Willson-Walker House for dinner, and they ran up these big tabs, and the chairman quit three weeks before the ball in some kind of scandal. I don't know how much – there's some truth to that, but I don't know how much. After that, I think – well, I don't know what changed after that, because I wasn't around to see what it was like beforehand, but that just emphasizes how important the auditor's position is,

because without somebody to really manage this, you can just go bonkers. Because, you know, even the auditor doesn't really know how much is being spent until the bills come in, because, you know, you've got eight people charging stuff. Some of them forget to bring in receipts. Some of them don't, and then if three people go buy something all at the same time, then you know, each one of those doesn't bust over the budget, but when you put them all three together, you know, the auditor really has to just do the best he or she can to control it. But it's a pretty big job, and it's certainly one I would not want and one that I don't think I could do a good job of.

Warren: So what was the theme that went so far over budget?

Framptom: I think that must have been the King Arthur's Court theme. I think that was the theme in 1991. Like I say, that was the year I was still in high school. I didn't get to that one, but it was King Arthur's Court, and apparently the decorations were really good, and I don't think they went over budget, I think they went over budget because of the Willson-Walker House type of thing as opposed to decorations, but I don't really know.

Warren: Well, one I've heard about that I'd love to know more about is the Orient Express. Do you know about—

Framptom: That was in, I think, 1988. Richard Weaver is the man that knows the history better than anybody else, because he's the one that—

Warren: I know. I've heard they brought in a railroad car?

Framptom: I don't know about that.

Warren: Apparently they brought in a railroad car, and I've always been dying to know how they did that.

Framptom: Wow. Yeah. They might have put it on the front porch. The year we did the Magic Carpet Ride, we got a camel from the Natural Bridge Zoo, and we had a camel out there on the entrance, but, you know, there are always some tacit rules. There's always some rules that the gym lays down, like no water in the gym, and I think

another one is no live animals in the gym. I don't know how they did the railroad – I never heard of the railroad car. I wouldn't be surprised if they did it.

Warren: I heard that people were going in and getting their pictures taken inside the railroad car or something.

Framptom: That's fascinating.

Warren: I just have a few more questions. You know that the origins of the Fancy Dress Ball was really fancy dress, that people wore costumes.

Framptom: Right.

Warren: Was there ever, in all your time, ever any talk about going back to costumes?

Framptom: There was. There was big talk about that in the 1994 ball, the Magic Carpet theme. There was talk about that, and we talked about it on the committee for a while, you know – do you want to do this? But I think it didn't pan out because people would think, well, some will come in costumes and some won't, and that won't be that cool, and people maybe don't want to spend all the money to put together the costume. There's only so many pre-made costumes out there that you can get, and there's so many people that want to go to the ball, that you're going to have a lot of duplication. That's a problem, because it's not like every guy just wears a – I mean, every guy wears a black tie to the thing. You know, you could do photocopies of everybody pretty much. But still, there was talk of that costume one year, and I don't know why it didn't pan out. Probably Monica Robinson knows. She was the chairman that year. She probably has a good idea why that didn't, why that didn't work.

Warren: Well, I'm lobbying hard for doing it in 1999 for the 250th anniversary.

Framptom: Yeah, it would definitely be neat. It would definitely be neat to have.

Warren: The pictures of those years when everybody was in costume are just marvelous.

Framptom: I bet that would be neat. If it turns out they do it, I'd like to come and see. But even if everybody just kind of wore a mask or something over a tux, that would really be neat.

Warren: Well, that's a good idea. That would certainly seem to be manageable.

Well, you have done a marvelous job of explaining Fancy Dress. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think we should?

Framptom: Well, the only thing I really wanted to make sure I said was inserting that business about how I think it's such a great tradition and the deal about how it unifies everybody. I think I got that stuck in somewhere. Coming in here, that was really what I wanted to say. I think for people like me who have done a lot of this and seen the specs on it, I think a lot of times we miss the forest for the trees. We get so tied up in what's in this corner and what was in the big gym and what was in the small gym, that we sometimes lose sight of the grander scheme or the grander deal about FD, which is the elegant ball that brings everybody together on this high social plateau, and it's this great tradition at the school, certainly not as great a tradition as the Honor Code, but it is, nevertheless, the greatest social tradition the school has and one that I think it would be a tragedy to see it die out or replaced or diminished in strength. It's really a marvelous event, an excellent opportunity for everybody to come together.

When I look back on the time I spent at W&L, the stuff I did, the opportunities I had at FD, and the chance I had to work with different people on this and that, and the creativity that, you know, it's just this wide open space for creativity. You know, there's nothing like it in terms of the committee. You just build this thing. "You build it and they will come" kind of thing. It's just fabulous. And when I look back on my years at W&L, FD is it. That's what I think about. I guess I lived and breathed it kind of for a while and I love it. I love thinking about it and I love remembering about it. I go home every now and again, you know, back to the folks' place and I dig through the stuff, and I could spend time just looking through there reading old newspaper clippings about it

and reading old playbills and stuff like that. It's just an amazing event, and I'm really lucky I had an opportunity to get involved. I'm really pleased that I could make a contribution, and it was great for me to come back this year, and I'm really pleased that they were able to let me get in there and play around a little bit. It was a great experience for me, then and now, something that I really have no regrets about, something that I love.

Warren: My last question is, do all of you who work so hard on it, are you so exhausted by the time the ball happens that you can't enjoy yourself? I worry about that.

Framptom: [laughter] That big push—because we get the gym on Tuesday, like Tuesday at noon or Tuesday morning or something, we get the gym, and everything's kind of been put together elsewhere, but still you have to bring it all together and assemble it, and it's this massive push. We used to work like sixteen hours a day Tuesday and Wednesday to try to get it put together so we could not work so hard on Thursdays and Fridays, but still, Leo and I and the other people, we joke about how we were running out of there with our toolboxes under our arms and people were coming in with tuxes. And that's a slight exaggeration, but not too bad, because some days before that ball I didn't get out of that gym until five or six o'clock on Friday night, and my date's already dressed and waiting for me, and I'm sweaty and got sawdust all over me, and I'm beat. But no, there's just—we were beat at the end of that week. I think everybody was beat. But that adrenaline rush of going to the ball that, you know, you don't dare miss it, you know. Yeah, that is a problem. Somewhere inside all of us, we always seem to find that reserve for those eight hours of going to dinner and hanging out and going to the ball, or six hours or whatever it takes. Then we just go home and sleep until about Thursday of the next week.

Warren: What happens to classes through all this? A minor question, of course.

Framptom: Yeah. Right. Well, most people it doesn't have much effect. For me, I missed some classes that week, but I remember being in some classes that week and

just – matter of fact, now I have a TA, and so I have these students at the University of New Hampshire where I'm in graduate school that I teach these labs to for Introduction to Geology, and I remember, I was looking through some of my old notes a couple of weeks ago, and I came to the week of FD and these notes, and they're just pitiful. They're just terrible. I mean, I was in class, but I was just dozing off. You know, you can see the words just kind of start off on the left side and they just kind of drop off the line by the right side, and physically because I was just not capable. So, I mean, I missed a few classes, but my professors were pretty – one of my professors let me reschedule a test once because he said – there was like a deadline for the test, and I said, "Can I take it just outside the deadline?"

"I know what you've got to do. You can just take it next week."

Another one of my professors my senior year, I missed his class on Friday, and he told his class, he said, "Well, Mr. Framptom's not here with us today, but we'll excuse him because he's in the ball preparing for FD," and so they let you cut a few corners for it.

Don't get me wrong, you know. Class is what we're here for, but it doesn't kill anybody to miss one or two here and there. So academics might have suffered a little bit, but in the long run, that GPA is just a little number, but FD is this flood of memories that I have that I wouldn't trade for any kind of grade changes, and, even then it didn't really make that big a difference anyway.

Warren: That's a great quote to end on, Joe. I can't imagine anything better. Thank you so much.

Framptom: Well, my pleasure. I hope I could help you out.

Warren: This has been great. You've set a high standard for Melissa.

Framptom: Well, I'm sure she'll match. I'm sure she'll match just as well. But the only thing is, I've had two years to sit back and kind of let all this stuff mold together and see

the forest instead of looking at all the trees. So she'll probably give you more nuts and bolts aspect of it.

Warren: I usually don't interview many students because I want them to have a little perspective, but it's just too irresistible to talk to her right coming off of it, and she may be just totally out there, but I'd like to try.

Framptom: I understand.

Warren: But you're a wonderful example of getting a little perspective.

Framptom: Well, I thank you. I'm glad to have the opportunity, and I hope to read about some of the good stuff in the book.

Warren: I think you will.

Framptom: Well, it was good.

Warren: Thank you, Joe.

Framptom: Yes, ma'am, thank you.

[End of interview]